A

MELANCHOLY

BUT

TRUE STORY.

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A Melancholy, but True Story.

NOW, whilst dread winter rolls his low'ring clouds,
With tempests charg'd, along the dark'ning skies,
Whilst o'er the snow-clad plains wild sweeps the blast,
And fear, and danger, all around us rise;—

Now, when the cheering smile, and ready boon
Of true benevolence should greet the poor;
Now, when free hospitality should court
The child of want to enter plenty's door;—

'Tis mine, whilst horror thrills thro' ev'ry vein,
Whilst indignation swells my lab'ring heart,
'Tis mine, (O painful task) 'tis mine, a tale,
Of mingled guilt, and mis'ry to impart:—

Dec

Deep plung'd in poverty, and worn with care,
By life's severe vexations sore opprest,
Lost in obscurity, unheeded, sad,
A female pin'd, deserted, tho' distrest;

Once ſhe had labor'd;—but can feeble frames
Sustain the cruel rage of wintry storms?
Can human nature long contend with pain,
And penury, in all their frightful forms?

To seek for aid, as from her dreary hut,
With tott'ring steps the mournful wand'rer stray'd,
She ſpy'd a baker's shop, and there beheld
In plenteous heaps, the tempting loaves display'd:

She gaz'd, approach'd, and purpos'd to implore
Assistance, should the maſter soon appear;
And trembling, on the threshold as she stood,
Wav'ring 'twixt anxious hope and chilling fear—

The maſter came;—his cold contemptuous air
Seem'd, as he pass'd, to warn her to depart;
And from beneath his dark and scowling brow,
She mark'd the glance of mean suspicion dart.

The feeling sensitive unequal shrinks
From the rude touch;—the tints of evening fly,
Before the shades of night;---and springs first buds,
Nipt by the killing frosts, untimely die:---

So shrank her heart; so fled her bright'ning hopes,
Shrouded by scorn, and fading in despair;
So, on her falt'ring tongue, expir'd half form'd
The supplicating speech, th' unfinish'd prayer.

Stern he mov'd on, and soon he disappear'd;
Ah! cruel man, t'observe her but the more:—
And now alone, and, as she thought, unseen,
Famish'd she stood, amidst the Miser's store:

Then

Then the dire conflict 'twixt temptation strong,
And principle arose; now hunger prest;
Now specious reas'nings sway'd her troubled mind;
And one sad thought prevail'd above the rest.

As the scar'd bird the long-wish'd morsel eyes,
Then snatches quick, impatient of delay,
She stretch'd her quiv'ring hand, and one small loaf
With trembling eagerness convey'd away.

Was this a fault, amidst such plenty plac'd?—
Urg'd by such num'rous woes, at such a time?
And yet, some stony-hearted cynic may,
With the harsh baker, term this deed a crime.

But know, unfeeling man, whoe'er thou art,
There is a name, a dear and sacred name,
A title, that can change this heinous crime
To virtue, and that title she might claim;—

She was a mother, and a mother's heart
Throbb'd in her breast; and could she then sustain
The soul-distracting thought of starving babes,
Or from the means of saving them refrain?

Breathless with haste, she reach'd her home, while tears
Of mingled shame and joy bedew'd her eyes;
And, as she wildly call'd her little flock,
And gather'd them, to share the precious prize,—

"For you," she cry'd, "for you, my children dear,
"I have obey'd necessity's command;
"I thought on you, my only ties to Earth,
"And ah! no longer could restrain my hand."

O that oblivion, with her dusky wings,
Could hide the sequel of this horrid tale!—
Yet no, let infamy th' oppressor brand,
While his poor victims' suff'rings we bewail!

The baker follow'd,—enter'd,—view'd the scene,—
Beheld of wretchedneſs the drear abode;
Unmov'd beheld,---for with no friendly warmth,
No sympathy, his icy bosom glow'd!

How shall the muse to virtue's ear disclose
This tyrant's conduct in the houſe of woe?
What language, on this grasping slave of gain,
This shame to man, just obloquy can throw?

He, deaf to nature's voice, and steel'd 'gainst all
The tender pleadings of a mother's tears,
Wrested the scanty morſel from her hands,
And left her, 'midst her sorrows and her fears:—

Her, and her children left,—expiring left,
To meet the horrors of approaching night;
Horrors, from which the welcome pow'r of death,
In pity, snatch'd them, e'er returning light.—

To picture scenes like these, alas! how vain
The painter's boasted art, and words how weak!
Yet fancy to the shrinking soul imparts,
What the sad muse but ill attempts to speak.

O ye poor suff'rers, mournful was your lot,
And mournfully ye trod life's thorny way!
But now, 'tis past,—to heav'n your wrongs were known,
And heav'n alone those wrongs can well repay.

But thou unhappy! thou detested! say,
Can peace again e'er smile within thy breast?
Or will the ceaseless pangs of sharp remorse
E'er leave thy guilty mind a moment's rest?

And when, to thee how dreadful, death shall wave
His conq'ring scythe o'er thy devoted head,
Think'st thou, thy disembodied soul can fly
For refuge, where thy victims' spirits fled?

Think'st thou, the pitiless can pity claim;
Will love divine on sordid av'rice wait?
Ah no! the gates of mercy will be clos'd,
While awful justice seals thine endless fate.

There are, who dance in pleasure's airy rounds,
Who ne'er were taught affliction to endure,
Yet, whose soft minds would feel compassion's thrill,
Did they but know the mis'ries of the poor:—

Go then to them, stain'd with this dire disgrace,
This history abhor'd, go faithful page,
Rouze them to indignation;—in the cause
Of helpless innocence their pow'r engage:—

Tell them, 'tis now the time to grave their names,
Not on th' insensate marble, vainly rais'd;
But, on their fellow creatures' grateful hearts,
To live for ever, honor'd, lov'd, and prais'd;—

For now, loud howls the wind, keen drives the sleet,
Fast from the heavy clouds the snows descend;
Now famine, sickness, varied pain, and death,
Stalk forth, and all their mingling terrors blend.

Alas! the howling wind is faintly heard,
Murm'ring around the dwellings of the great;
Far louder swells the noise of song and dance,
And thoughtless mirth, 'midst revelry and state!—

But O how mournful sounds the piercing blast,
That tears, and shakes the poor man's humble shed;
So shrilly whistling thro' th' unsteady roof,
That seems to totter o'er his aching head!

Happy the man, possess'd of will and pow'r,
To raise the drooping, and defend th' opprest
The man, who cannot smile, whilst others weep;
Still prone to pity, still in blessing blest;—

The man, who, God-like, seeks the silent cells,
The lone retreats, and dreary haunts of grief,
Starts from the downy couch of ease, and flies
To give the welcome, wish'd, unhop'd relief:

Selfish indulgence spreads her lures in vain,
His spirit knows to scorn the syren form;
Nor can the tempest's rage retard his speed,
In virtue's cause he nobly braves the storm:

Love and unfeign'd respect attend his steps;
His glad'ning presence checks the rising sigh;
He hastes to turn affliction's flowing tears,
To tears of boundless gratitude, and joy:—

Then the pure flame of conscious worth shall rise,
To cheer and animate his gen'rous heart;
Then each keen blast shall fan that flame divine,
And to his breast a warmer glow impart.

Sons of prosperity! whose Vessels trim,
Are borne along by wealth's increasing tide,
Vot'ries of riot, in whose stately domes
Reign mirth and splendor, luxury and pride!—

How can ye feast, while thousands round you starve?
How can ye view, unmov'd, their piercing woes?
Ah! while so many wake, and wake to weep,
How can ye lose your hours in soft repose?

Did He, who bade the beams of fortune's sun
Disperse from you each gloom that might annoy,—
Did He intend those beams to be absorb'd
By black ingratitude, or selfish joy?

The virtuous man reflects those envied rays,
As the fair moon emits her borrow'd light;
Like her, looks forth to glad the mourning world,
And cheer, of dark adversity, the night:

Who-e'er

Who-e'er that man, where-e'er like her he moves,
Thus in his sphere, the fav'rite of the skies,
May blessings bright, and num'rous as the stars,
That gem the spacious heav'ns, around him rise.

C. C.

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FINIS.

A. & E. SMITH; PRINTERS, POOL-LANE, LIVERPOOL.
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